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ABSTRACT

Small/rural community colleges should be integral parts of the communities they serve, catalysts for community development, and adaptable to community change. Collaboration with community agencies to develop efficient needs-specific programs and to use community residents as resources offer ways for colleges to provide educational courses and activities and to serve as recreational, cultural, and civic centers. Northeastern Junior College (Sterling, Colorado) is immersed in its service area--five counties and thousands of square miles of sparsely populated areas. Examples of Northeastern-community cooperative projects are a legal services referral office, management workshops for local small business owners, a Job Training Partnership Act (JIPA) Summer Youth Training Program, a women's forum addressing concerns of female heads-of-households, daily living skills classes for developmentally disabled adults, workshops on effective participation on boards and committees, cooperative teaching projects with school districts including credit/noncredit courses and a mobile computer instruction program, aid to local farmers in computerizing farm business, health care classes, educational and entertainment programs for senior citizens, job placement services for community residents, and provision of facilities and instruction in cooperation with a four-year college. (LFL)

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"THE ROLE OF THE SMALL/RURAL COMMUNITY COLLEGES WITHIN THEIR SERVICE AREAS"

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I appreciate your coming to this round table at such at early time, and, hopefully, when you leave here, you will have had an opportunity not only to get a better view of what we, at Northeastern Junior College, believe the role that the small/rural community colleges have in their service areas. We hope you will have the opportunity to ask questions; to give us ideas and suggestions, because there is seldom a time when I have given a presentation that I didn't learn more from the members of the audience than I was able to give.

So--let me first give you what I see as the role of small/rural community colleges and then, when I finish, I would very much appreciate your asking questions to which I'll try to answer and give you an opportunity to discuss your views on this topic.

I see the role of Northeastern Junior College as it relates to its service area as being simply "The college of the community." Northeastern Junior College is the college of that community--that community means five counties and thousands of square miles of sparsely populated area. That means the small/rural community colleges must be adaptable to change; as the various communities change with new conditions, demands and circumstances, these colleges must be able to increase the community awareness in each of those areas it serves. These colleges must emphasize community development--a "must" for small/rural schools. Community development

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needs to involve the establishment of linkages, cooperative relationships with a myriad of community organizations. Through these cooperative relationships, the small/rural college should be able to aid those in each community who want to learn how to secure the basic needs and many of their wants within their own environment, such as employment upgrading, health improvement, and the entire area of citizenship rights and responsibilities; but, overall, this role must involve the college collaborating with the community agencies to provide access to educational needs; to develop programs specific to the needs of those community citizens, and then deliver those programs at a low cost, with much efficiency. In order to accomplish that task, many community people, as well as the regular college staff, need to be used as resources for the delivery of the various programs and activities that are needed and wanted within the college service area.

I see a major role of the small/rural community college to be that of a catalyst in the entire community development spectrum. Therefore, the small/rural community college should be effective in its service area through a continuous involvement with the many segments of the citizens within that college district.

And how can one accomplish this type of role effectively? Within each college district there are unique needs; yet, all colleges have similar kinds of programs and most communities have some similarity in the needs and wants within those communities.

Let me give you a brief overview of some of the ways that NJC has become completely immersed in its service area. By some of these examples you will be able to see that we believe that we are an intricate and intimate part of our college community. The role of NJC within its service area can be delineated by the following:

1) Pro bono project - Our community determined there was a need for legal services for the poor. By working with our local bar association and the Colorado bar association, a legal services office was established only to refer people to the proper agency. We have a volunteer who manages the office established on our campus, takes information from clients to determine their financial status, and

then refers them (when they qualify) to a local attorney. Currently, 13 local attorneys are participating in the program and, within the first two months, each of the attorneys was given at least one case. At this time, after less than a year in the program, it appears that this program is very successful; however, our volunteer who works on campus is looking to recruit additional attorneys to participate in this program.

2) A mini-management series - At the request of the local downtown development group, a series of management workshops was created to offer the local small business owners the opportunity for some training in specific areas of need. First there was a survey sent to all local businesses to determine the areas of interest, and then a series of presenters were scheduled with the most popular topics as determined by the survey. Over 65 people attended one or more of the sessions, and most of the participants attended three of the five sessions with an average size of over 30 people per session. Most presenters were local individuals, including college staff members.

3) JTPA Summer Youth Training Program - This program was begun through JTPA funds by working with government representatives, and this year we have a joint effort to offer training to disadvantaged youths employed during our summer months. The training encompasses the areas of attitudes and interpersonal relationships, pre-employment considerations, and job retention, first aid and safety training. It is hoped that the training will give students between the ages of 16 and 22 some of the skills that they will need to remain gainfully employed in the future.

4) Women's Forum Series - The local community college has an obligation to work with various agencies that deal specifically with problems of the single family, head-of-household. With that thought in mind, NJC provided a women's forum series. These topics basically are of interest to women but we do not exclude anyone from attending those series. During the current year, we expect to have 12 of these workshops and most of these are held during the lunch hour.

5) The college also has a project called "College for Living." Classes are offered for local, developmentally-disabled adults in a variety of subject areas, including exercise, recreational activities, basic cooking, computers, and hair care. Participant aid and expertise are obtained from the Northeast Colorado Services for the Handicapped, and the Centennial Mental Health Center. Students attend most classes on campus and are encouraged to interact with the regular community college students.

6) Since there are so many boards, committees and advisory groups, NJC also became part of the "Building Better Boards" project through AACJC. NJC has been involved with the Kellogg Foundation and other community colleges in the state in the Building Better Boards project and, to date, we have had over 100 people take advantage of that workshop series.

7) In order to really become part of the community, we look at the role of our college, in particular, in working with all school districts. There are 14 in the five-county service area, and we have formal working agreements with all school districts. This has been a very successful project of ours which began only five years ago, and to date we have had thousands of people in each of those communities who have been involved with the college and the local school district in various activities, credit and non-credit courses, and other involvements. Three years ago, the college received a computer van from the State Board for Community Colleges and Occupational Education. In each of the last three summers, we have had the computer van go to each of the 14 school districts and a number of other smaller communities within those districts to offer computer instruction and to upgrade employee skills with, not only word processing, but also other kinds of computer needs. The school and the college work closely together to provide the necessary information and instruction for those who want computer instruction near their homes.

8) Farm Business Management - We have a computerized farm business management curriculum and, at the present time, we have involvement with farmers in the entire northeast Colorado area. We have a full-time person assigned to help these people computerize their farm accounting and futures projects with the cattle and commodities markets. We work through the Young Farmer organizations as well as with independent farmers to meet the computer needs of those individuals.

9) We have an extensive program in health care, such as first aid, CPR and EMT sponsored by the Red Cross and the services delivered through Northeastern Junior College.

In addition, there is a GED and ABE-ESL program in eight of the 14 school districts where students go to those schools to get their ABE or GED instruction.

10) Another successful program was Arts and Humanities for Senior Citizens. Each year hundreds of senior citizens have an opportunity for cultural involvement with the college in their local communities. We have 17 locations where we take programs, entertainment and cultural kinds of interactions. This program has now been in existence for four years and has been most successful.

11) The job placement at NJC functions not only for the college students, but we also involve the community since the City of Sterling itself and the immediate area has no federal job placement service; therefore, the college tries to provide employee-employer match-ups wherever possible.

12) A very important program as far as the role of our college is to house the offices of a four-year college and to provide the instruction for a B.A. or B.S. degree. We have a formal, cooperative agreement with Regis College, Denver. In its first year, there were 44 students enrolled in the Regis B.A. program, and this has now become a model for some other colleges in the state where the location of the two-year school is a great distance from a four-year college or university.

There are hundreds of other examples which I could give, but I think from the ones that I've stated you have an idea of what we think the role of a small/

rural community college should be. To summarize what we believe the role is: 1) It is a deliverer of educational courses and activities. 2) It is involved as a recreational center for the citizens of this area. 3) It certainly is a cultural center for northeast Colorado, and 4) It is a provider of facilities for many groups and organizations who would have no other place to hold their meetings, conferences or other kinds of activities. Truly, the role of a small/rural community college within that service area is as diverse as the needs of that community. There ought to be no limit to the involvement within that service district, and a forward-looking community-junior college should never consider any requests as either not feasible or too much work! I have a general philosophy about the role of the community college--it is only as good as the involvement within that community and as effective as how it serves the many, many needs of each of the citizens within that service area.

Thank you for allowing me the time to give you our view of the community college role. Now, let us continue with your questions.

MWW/hw